Historical Nation, Political Consciousness, and the Census of the Catalan People

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Abstract

This essay develops a layered theory of the nation as a historically settled human community, rooted in territorial continuity, cultural transmission, written and situated culture, and collective memory. It distinguishes between the historical nation, the conscious nation, and the political nation, arguing that a people may exist before the state, without the state, or even against a state that denies it. Applied to the Catalan case, the text proposes a distinction between three levels of national belonging: the ancestral or genealogical census, the cultural census, and the political census. The ancestral census identifies historical origin; the cultural census identifies effective participation in Catalan cultural life, especially the habitual use of the Catalan language; and the political census identifies loyalty to the project of Catalan national continuity. The essay argues that a political census must be open enough to include loyal newcomers, but also capable of excluding those who act against the continuity of the nation. In this sense, the political census is formulated as a dynamic adjustment of the ancestral or cultural base: incorporating loyal false negatives and excluding hostile false positives.

Tags: historical nation; political consciousness; Catalonia; Catalan people; national continuity; cultural transmission; ancestral census; cultural census; political census; national loyalty; self-government; national survival; language use; territorial rootedness; collective identity.

1. The Nation as a Historical Reality

A nation is not, in its deepest origin, a simple administrative construction, nor a legal decision of the State, nor an accidental sum of individuals gathered in a territory. A nation is a **historically settled human community**, a population that has been born, lived, worked, loved, died, and reproduced for generations within the same space, until turning that territory into a form of its own continuity.

This continuity is not merely material. It does not consist only in the fact that certain people have occupied a territory for a long time, but in the fact that these people have historically transformed themselves within it and, at the same time, have transformed the territory. The nation is not merely the occupation of a space: it is the **historical impregnation of a territory**. It is a written culture inscribed in settlements, houses, fields, roads, churches, cemeteries, monuments, archives, place names, institutions, cities, and worked landscapes.

A nation appears when human presence ceases to be mere transit or mere occupation and becomes sedimentation. A people does not merely live in a place: it leaves a mark there, accumulates memory there, orders labor there, develops stable forms of agriculture there, creates law there, writes there, builds there, buries its dead there, and projects the future of its children there.

In this sense, a nation may be understood as a **historically territorialized ethnicity**: not a race, nor pure biology, but a human population that, through historical sedimentation, has generated its own culture in its own place. It may have linguistic, cultural, legal, religious, artistic, demographic, and even

genetic manifestations in a broad sense of population continuity. But the foundation of the nation is not isolated genetics, but the **living continuity of a people in a land**.

The nation is therefore a reality prior to many modern political forms. Before constitutions, parties, electoral censuses, or contemporary States exist, a nation may already exist as a historical reality, with a written and situated culture, with developed agriculture, with stable settlements, and with accumulated memory in the territory.

A people becomes a nation when it has endured long enough in a place to turn time into culture. And it is precisely this written and situated culture, this developed agriculture, this monumentality, and this territorial impregnation that distinguish a nation from any tribe. Not in the sense of absolute moral superiority, but in the sense of a much denser degree of historical, territorial, institutional, and cultural sedimentation.

2. The Nation as Continuity of Cultural Life

The nation is not only memory of the past. It is also transmission. A nation lives insofar as it transmits. It transmits language, names, bonds, forms of relationship, ways of working, organizing, celebrating, suffering, remembering, and hoping.

A community may have monuments, ancient documents, and archaeological remains, but that is not enough to make it a living nation. A living nation needs human continuity and cultural continuity. It needs a chain between generations: parents, children, grandparents, grandchildren, teachers, neighbors, towns, neighborhoods, trades, songs, words, rituals, and institutions that maintain or renew the consciousness of a “we.”

This continuity is not merely biological, but neither is it purely ideological. It is a continuity of cultural life. The nation continues to exist when successive generations not only descend from previous ones, but also receive, recreate, and transmit a way of life. A nation is not only blood, but neither is it merely opinion. It is a historical continuity of population, language, culture, territory, memory, and institutions.

For this reason, a nation is not merely a glorious past. It is a form of continuity that must be reproduced. When transmission is broken, the nation may become memory, folklore, an object of study, or museum heritage, but it progressively ceases to be an active historical reality.

The nation, therefore, is a continuity that can die. Its survival is not guaranteed merely because it once existed. It may disappear through conquest, linguistic replacement, demographic colonization, cultural assimilation, political repression, economic dissolution, internal fragmentation, or loss of consciousness. A nation that does not defend the conditions of its continuity may end up becoming a shadow of itself.

3. The Unconscious Nation and the Conscious Nation

A nation may exist for a long time without explicitly formulating itself as a political subject. It may live as a historical community, as a people, as a language, as a culture, as a collective habit, without yet having developed a modern theory of itself.

This would be the **historical nation**: the nation that exists because it has endured, because it has taken root, because it has generated its own form of life, and because it has inscribed that life in the territory.

But a moment may arrive when a nation recognizes itself. This recognition is a decisive step. The nation ceases to be merely inherited continuity and becomes consciousness. It is no longer only “what we are because we come from where we come from,” but also what we are because we have consciousness, written culture, monumental culture, and situated memory.

This is the **conscious nation**. A conscious nation no longer lives only by historical inertia: it recovers, interprets, and reactivates its own continuity. It thinks itself, defines itself, defends itself, represents itself, and projects itself. It turns its memory into argument, its language into right, its culture into living heritage, and its continuity into will.

The historical nation is duration and persistent existence, even if it may be passive.

The conscious nation is memory of itself and activation of that memory. This implies an active and productive relationship.

The political nation is the will to continue, and this will implies reactive and proactive capacity: reactive in order to defend itself against what threatens it, and proactive in order to build the future conditions of its permanence.

4. The Political Nation

When a nation recognizes itself as a collective subject, it may begin to act politically. This action may adopt different forms. The best known is the State of its own: the nation that gives itself a State and becomes a nation-state. But this is not the only possible form.

A nation may express itself politically through a sovereign State, but also through forms of self-government, its own institutions, its own law, cultural representation, organized communities, diasporic structures, or movements of national reconstruction. The ideal national State is a very powerful form of national protection, but it is not the only way of existing politically.

In fact, there are nations that have existed without a State for long periods. The Jewish case is a fundamental example: a nation that maintained consciousness of itself, memory, religion, genealogy, culture, and hope of return throughout centuries of dispersion. This shows that the State does not necessarily create the nation. Often it is the nation that precedes the State, demands it, loses it, reconstructs it, or waits for it.

A nation may therefore exist before the State, without the State, or even against a State that denies it. What defines the nation is not simply having state institutions, but maintaining historical continuity and collective consciousness sufficient to want to persevere and to determine its present and future situation.

5. The Right of National Perseverance

When a nation becomes politically conscious, a fundamental question emerges: its right to continue existing.

A nation cannot be reduced to a simple aggregation of interchangeable individuals. If a nation is a historical, cultural, linguistic, and human continuity, then its disappearance is not a simple neutral sociological change. It is the loss of a singular form of human existence.

For this reason, a conscious nation may claim the right to protect the conditions of its continuity: language, school, cultural transmission, material prosperity, territory, memory, institutions, social reproduction, symbols, and the capacity to politically integrate those who loyally join its collective project.

This defense must not necessarily be confused with the denial of individual rights. The question is different: if only individual rights are recognized and no collective right of historical peoples is recognized, stateless nations or subordinated nations remain exposed to processes of replacement, absorption, or dissolution without legitimate instruments of defense.

The conscious nation must be able to distinguish between integration and replacement, coexistence and colonization, openness and dissolution, loyal incorporation and external interference. A living national community may open itself to new members, but it cannot turn that openness into the mechanism of its own disappearance.

6. From the Liberal Nation to the Self-Conscious Nation

For a long time, many modern nations have defined themselves in a liberal, civic, or administrative manner. They have preferred to present themselves as open communities based on citizenship, residence, or formal adherence to institutions. This definition has had advantages: it has avoided closed forms of biological nationalism and has made it possible to integrate people of diverse origins.

But it has also carried a risk: it has made many nations stop speaking clearly about their own historical continuity. In some cases, civic discourse has served to protect the dominant nation, which already had a State, an army, a school system, a market, an administration, and an official language. But for subordinated nations, this same discourse may become a trap: if the weaker nation ceases to define itself as a historical nation, while the stronger State continues to impose its language, its culture, and its political demography, the result is not neutrality, but replacement.

For this reason, a more complete idea of the nation must be recovered: an idea that is neither purely racial nor purely administrative; that does not reduce the nation to blood, but neither to state paperwork; that recognizes the importance of history, culture, language, demographic continuity, political consciousness, and loyalty.

The self-conscious nation does not simply say: “everyone who resides here is automatically part of our national subject.” Nor does it say: “only those who genealogically come from the old core may be part of it.” It says something more complex: the nation has a historical reality, but it may also have a political vision; it has a cultural core of ancestral bond with the territory, but it may also have a loyal periphery; it has inherited memory, but it may also have a shared will for the future.

7. The Catalan Case: Historical Nation and Political Nation

The Catalan people may be understood through this double dimension.

On the one hand, Catalonia is a historical nation: a human community settled in a territory, with its own language, its own law, historical institutions, its own culture, collective memory, and social continuity. It is not a simple administrative region nor a recent invention. It is a reality sedimented over centuries.

On the other hand, Catalonia is also a nation that needs to recognize itself politically. The Catalan nation cannot limit itself to being a cultural memory, a family language, or a literary tradition. If it wants to

continue existing as a living nation, it must become a political subject: it must know who it is, what it wants to preserve, how it wants to integrate, what it must defend itself against, and what future it wants to build. And it cannot wait for the Catalan State to become a reality before acting reactively and proactively.

Here appears the question of the **census of the Catalan people**.

8. The Census as an Instrument of National Consciousness

A national census is not only a list. It is a form of recognition. It serves to answer a fundamental question: who forms part of the collective subject?

But this question may have different answers depending on the level one wishes to define. An ancestral census, a cultural or historical-origin census, and a political census are not the same thing. It is not the same to identify the genealogical core of a nation, to identify its effective cultural belonging, or to identify the set of people who may loyally participate in its political project of continuity.

For this reason, it is necessary to distinguish clearly between:

1. **The ancestral census of the Catalan people.**
2. **The cultural census of the Catalan people.**
3. **The political census of the Catalan people.**

This distinction is essential because it avoids two opposite errors: on the one hand, dissolving the Catalan nation into a mere resident population; on the other, closing it to the point of preventing any real political incorporation of people who, without forming part of the original core, have assumed the Catalan cause as their own.

9. The Catalan Ancestral Census

The Catalan ancestral census identifies the deepest and most original level of continuity of the Catalan people: the relationship of descent, family bond, historical reproduction, and territorial rootedness. It is not a racial doctrine, nor a biological reduction of the nation, but the recognition that historical peoples are not simple abstract ideas, but real human continuities.

A historical nation has families, lineages, genealogies, surnames, towns, houses, cemeteries, local memories, and forms of kinship accumulated over time. It has a certain continuity of blood and a certain genetic continuity in a broad sense, not as an absolute criterion of value, but as a material trace of its permanence in the territory.

The ancestral census, therefore, should not be understood as an instrument of moral exclusion, but as an instrument for recognizing the root. It makes it possible to identify the human core that historically comes from the Catalan people, the original continuity that has maintained the language, the land, the institutions, the customs, and the memory of the country across generations.

This level is important because every historical nation has a concrete dimension of human continuity. If this dimension is completely erased, the nation becomes a purely voluntarist or administrative abstraction. But the ancestral census alone does not resolve the whole national question, because the nation is not only origin: it is also living culture and political project.

10. The Catalan Cultural Census

The Catalan cultural census identifies the cultural core of the Catalan nation: those who form part of the linguistic, symbolic, family, educational, territorial, and everyday continuity of the Catalan people. It is a census of depth, transmission, lived belonging, and organic bond with Catalan culture.

This census may be more demanding than the political census. It may have a linguistic, cultural, territorial, and family dimension. It may ask who has received the language, who has been socialized in the Catalan world, who lives within Catalan culture, who forms part of this chain of transmission that comes from afar.

This would be the level that could be linked to a stricter, cultural, or neo-Barnic conception of Catalanness: an idea centered on the historical core of the Catalan people, on its permanence, on its root, and on its deepest continuity.

This cultural census is important because it protects a truth that is often intended to be erased: that the Catalan people is not a simple ideological option, but a concrete historical reality. There is an inherited, transmitted, lived, family, linguistic, and territorial Catalanness. To deny this would be to turn Catalonia into an abstraction without a people.

However, the cultural census cannot be reduced to passive competence either. It is not enough to know the Catalan language; the culturally relevant criterion is habitual use. A language that is known but not used does not guarantee national continuity. What keeps a culture alive is not only that individuals can understand it, but that they use it as the ordinary language of relationship, transmission, thought, family, school, work, and public life.

But this cultural census, although necessary, does not resolve the whole political question.

11. The Catalan Political Census

The political census of the Catalan people must be more open than the ancestral census and the cultural census. It cannot be reduced only to origin, because politics concerns not only memory but also the future. A nation that wants to organize itself politically needs to know not only who comes from its historical core or who lives fully within its culture, but also who is willing to defend its continuity.

The political census should not be a simple copy of the administrative register. Not every resident automatically forms part of the Catalan national subject. But neither should it be an exact copy of the ancestral census or the strict cultural census. There may be people who do not come from the Catalan historical core, but who have adopted a clear loyalty toward Catalonia, have learned and habitually use the language, have contributed to its culture, have defended its continuity, and have accepted becoming part of its collective destiny.

Thus, the Catalan political census should be located at an intermediate point:

- more demanding than mere residence;
- more open than ancestral or original cultural belonging;
- more political than genealogical;
- more national than administrative;
- more based on loyalty than on mere physical presence.

The political census of the Catalan people would answer a different question from that of the ancestral census and the cultural census. The ancestral census asks: **who historically comes from the Catalan people?** The cultural census asks: **who effectively lives within Catalan culture?** The political census asks: **who can legitimately form part of the project of continuity and defense of Catalonia?**

The political census, therefore, is not only a mechanism of inclusion, but also of delimitation. In order to include politically, it must also be possible to exclude politically. This does not mean denying basic human rights or turning origin into a sentence, but distinguishing between national belonging and mere residence, between loyalty and hostility, between real integration and action against Catalan continuity.

In this sense, the political census may be understood as the original census — ancestral or cultural — subjected to adjustments. On the one hand, it is necessary to integrate **false negatives**: people who do not come from the Catalan ancestral or cultural core, but who are loyal to Catalan continuity and truly incorporate themselves into it. On the other hand, it is necessary to exclude **false positives**: people who may have Catalan origin, Catalan residence, or an appearance of integration, but who act in a hostile way against Catalan national continuity.

The conceptual formula would be:

Political census = ancestral/cultural base census + incorporation of loyal false negatives − exclusion of hostile false positives.

This idea makes it possible to think of the political census not as a rigid category, but as an instrument of national defense and reconstruction. It is not only a matter of knowing who was originally there, but of knowing who truly contributes to continuing the Catalan people.

12. Root, Culture, and Alliance

The distinction may be summarized as follows:

The ancestral census defines the original human root.
The cultural census defines effective Catalan life.
The political census defines the national alliance of continuity.

The root is what comes from afar: the family, territorial, and genealogical continuity of the Catalan people. Without root, the nation dissolves into an empty idea.

Culture is what keeps this root alive: the language habitually used, the forms of life, the symbols, the institutions, the memory, and daily transmission. Without living culture, the root becomes memory.

Alliance is what makes it possible to build a future: the incorporation of people who, without necessarily coming from this root or initially participating in all of Catalan culture, loyally bind themselves to it and contribute to its continuity. Without alliance, the nation may be reduced to a defensive minority, incapable of politically organizing its survival.

A nation needs all three things. It needs a root that is not erased, a culture that does not cease to be used, and a political capacity for incorporation that does not betray it. It needs memory and project. It needs inheritance and adherence. It needs continuity and decision.

13. Against Administrative Dissolution

One of the great dangers for the Catalan nation is confusing the Catalan people with the administrative population of Catalonia. This confusion may seem democratic or inclusive, but in reality it may end up erasing the historical nation.

If anyone who resides temporarily or administratively in Catalonia is automatically considered part of the Catalan national subject, then the nation ceases to be a historical continuity and becomes a simple changing sum of inhabitants. This may favor processes of replacement, especially when there is a stronger State that promotes another language, another identity, and another national consciousness.

The Catalan nation cannot be reduced to the municipal register. The register records inhabitants. The national census should recognize origin, culture, belonging, loyalty, and continuity.

This does not mean denying civil or human rights to residents. It means distinguishing between administrative citizenship and national subjecthood. A person may have individual, labor, social, or civil rights without necessarily forming part of the Catalan national political subject. National belonging is a deeper question than mere residence.

14. Against Absolute Closure

But there is also an opposite danger: turning the nation into a completely closed category, incapable of incorporating people who have truly bound themselves to Catalonia. This would turn the nation into a defensive relic, more concerned with preserving an impossible purity than with building a viable continuity.

A living nation is not a museum piece. A living nation can integrate. But integration does not mean dissolution. To integrate means to incorporate someone into a continuity that already exists. Whoever integrates does not replace the receiving people, but enters its history, assumes its language, respects its memory, and contributes to its continuity.

The political census should allow this incorporation. It should recognize those who, coming from other origins, do not act as agents of replacement, but as loyal participants in Catalan national reconstruction.

For this reason, the criterion cannot be only origin. It must also be the political and cultural position toward Catalan continuity.

15. The Criterion of National Loyalty: Inclusion and Exclusion

The political census of the Catalan people should be based on a central idea: **Catalan national loyalty**.

This loyalty does not mean blind adherence to a party, ideological uniformity, or submission to a concrete doctrine. It means recognizing Catalonia as a historical nation and assuming that its continuity has political value. It means not working for its dissolution. It means respecting and promoting the Catalan language, accepting the country’s own memory, recognizing the right of the Catalan people to decide its future, and contributing to its permanence.

This loyalty may be expressed in many ways: learning and habitually using Catalan, participating in Catalan institutions, defending self-government or sovereignty, respecting the country’s own culture,

educating children in the language and memory of the country, or simply assuming that Catalonia is not an undifferentiated province, but a nation with the right to continue existing.

But national loyalty also implies a negative dimension: the possibility of excluding from the political census those who act persistently against Catalan continuity. No political community can survive if it is obliged to recognize as part of its national subject those who actively work to dissolve it, replace it, or subordinate it.

This exclusion should not necessarily be understood as physical expulsion or as a denial of basic rights, but as exclusion from national political recognition. In modern terms, it would be a form of disaffiliation from the Catalan national subject: a way of saying that not every residence, not every origin, and not every administrative presence automatically amounts to national political belonging.

At this point, the ancient idea of Greek ostracism may be recovered as a political reference. Ostracism expressed that a community could temporarily separate those it considered dangerous to its political continuity. In a contemporary formulation, this idea should not necessarily translate into physical banishment, but into the possibility of institutionally and symbolically separating the national subject from those who are hostile to it.

To truly include, it must be possible to exclude. If integration has no requirement and no consequence in the face of persistent disloyalty, then it ceases to be integration and becomes a costless option. A nation that cannot politically sanction disloyalty remains defenseless before those who can live within it without assuming any obligation toward its continuity.

Thus, the political census would not be a closed ethnic census, but neither would it be a purely administrative census. It would be a census of national political belonging: open to the loyal, even if they are not original members, and closed to the hostile, even if they have origin, residence, or an appearance of integration.

16. The Catalan Nation as a Project of Continuity

The fundamental question is that Catalonia cannot limit itself to remembering that it was a nation. It must decide whether it wants to continue being one.

This decision requires moving from nostalgia to institution, from culture to politics, from memory to organization. The census of the Catalan people may be an instrument within this process: a way of separating levels, identifying the ancestral root, recognizing living culture, opening a loyal political belonging, and not confusing the nation with a simple administrative population.

The Catalan people need to know who they are. But they also need to know whom they can count on. The ancestral census answers the question of origin. The cultural census answers the question of effective Catalan life. The political census answers the question of political continuity.

The ancestral census says: these are those who historically come from the Catalan people.
The cultural census says: these are those who effectively live within Catalan culture.
The political census says: these are those who want to continue it politically.

17. Conclusion

A nation is a human community historically settled in a territory, a population that has generated cultural, linguistic, social, and symbolic continuity across generations. This nation may exist before recognizing itself politically, but when it recognizes itself, it becomes a subject of will: it no longer merely endures, but wants to continue.

This consciousness may be expressed through a State, through self-government, through institutions of its own, or even through forms of diasporic persistence. What is decisive is that the nation acquires consciousness of its own continuity and of the danger of losing it.

In the Catalan case, this theory leads to a distinction between ancestral or genealogical census, cultural census, and political census. The ancestral census identifies the continuity of origin of the Catalan people. The cultural census identifies effective cultural belonging. The political census identifies active loyalty to the project of Catalan continuity.

This distinction makes it possible to avoid both administrative dissolution and sterile closure. Catalonia cannot be reduced to any resident population, but neither should it deny the incorporation of those who, without originally coming from its historical core, have decided to bind themselves to its future.

The nation needs roots in order not to disappear.
It needs living culture in order not to fossilize.
It needs consciousness in order to recognize itself.
It needs politics in order to defend itself.
And it needs a political census in order to know who truly participates in its continuity.

In short, the ancestral census defines who historically comes from the Catalan people. The cultural census defines who is effectively within the Catalan people. The political census defines who is willing to continue it. A living nation needs all these dimensions: fidelity to its history, the living use of its culture, and the capacity to politically organize its future.